

A simple way to make an impact in a complicated world

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THE ISSUE

Two new philanthropic groups have sprung up in Lancaster County: 100 Women Who Care, and 100 Men Who Care. The first chapter of 100 Women Who Care was founded in Michigan in 2006; today, there are more than 275 chapters across North America. That grass-roots organization gave rise to 100 Men Who Care, 100 People Who Care, and 100 Kids Who Care.

It's a simple idea — a simple way to give for people who lead busy and complicated lives.

Attend a meeting three times a year with at least 99 other people. Vote on a nonprofit worthy of support at each meeting, write a check for \$100 each time, and watch the happy results.

There's no organizational overhead, no administrative hierarchy, no middle men.

There are, instead, people who may not be able to give vast sums, but can give modest donations — and organizations that benefit when these ordinary people pool their resources.

Groups that practice this form of grass-roots philanthropy are called "giving circles."

They've existed in Lancaster County for years, and have supported everything from counseling services for women, to childbirth resources in Tibet, to services for young victims of domestic violence.

Giving circles "are growing in popularity, impact and importance across the United States," according to a study by the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers.

If you think this form of giving merely encourages people to write checks from a distance, think again.

That same study noted that "giving circle members are passionately engaged. ... (G)iving circles promote collective learning, decision-making and giving. ... Donors learn about community issues and become deeply involved in nonprofit organizations they may never have known existed."

No wonder this form of philanthropy is growing. In a complex world, it's beautiful in its simplicity.

Sarah Yohe, an organizer here, learned about 100 Women Who Care from her mother, who belongs to a chapter in New Brunswick, Canada.

Yohe worried the Lancaster group might not draw even 100 women to its inaugural meeting in March. It now has grown to include more than 220 women. (One of the group's members envisions Clipper Magazine Stadium packed with women, eager to give to local nonprofits.)

The group's members nominate potential recipients. The names of those nonprofits are dropped into a basket.

Three names are drawn from the basket, and each of the three nonprofits is given five minutes to make its pitch. Then the women vote for their choice.

At the group's first meeting, Schreiber Pediatric Rehab Center received \$9,000; additional checks have swelled the total to \$12,700.

Schreiber President James DeBord says his organization, which provides therapy programs for children with disabilities, developmental delays and acquired injuries, belongs to the part of the health care field that gets the lowest reimbursement.

And it recently lost United Way funding. "Without philanthropy in this community, Schreiber wouldn't exist," DeBord says.

To go in front of 100-plus women, from diverse backgrounds, to tell the Schreiber story, was a "priceless" opportunity, he says.

Tricia Nabors is the director of New Choices, which provides single mothers, displaced homemakers and other women in transition with job-seeking skills and career training.

Since the June 2 meeting of 100 Women Who Care, New Choices has received \$14,700 — more than a third of its \$40,000 annual budget — and money still is rolling in.

"I'm standing in the room, and I see so many people I don't know, and I honestly said, 'This is a win-win,' " says Nabors, who was elated by the chance to tell those new acquaintances about the unsung work of New Choices.

"Words can't even explain how grateful I am for what happened that evening."

Some of that nonprofit's funding comes from the state. If the current budget impasse stretches on, and state funding slows, the money will help New Choices to keep the doors open.

Nabors also hopes to put the money toward scholarship opportunities and study materials for the nonprofit's clients.

This giving circle seeks to give smaller local nonprofits "a voice that they probably can't afford to have in terms of marketing budgets," Yohe says.

It's a laudable goal, and we salute the members of both 100 Women Who Care and 100 Men Who Care.

Ours is a generous community, but the needs sometimes seem insurmountable. It's amazing what can happen when people come together.



100 women

At a recent meeting of 100 Women Who Care in Lancaster, women place their choices for the nonprofits they support in a basket.

Get involved:

100womenwhocare-lancaster.com

100menwhocarelancaster.com

Day 2: Waiting for a Pa. budget

Tuesday was the first day of the new fiscal year.

Gov. Tom Wolf proposed his budget. The Republicans passed their budget bill Tuesday night; it was promptly vetoed by Wolf.

It's time to negotiate a deal.

Wolf promised change in the way Pennsylvania schools are funded. Republicans promised pension reform.

There is no reason that good-faith negotiations cannot produce both.